5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
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where wells are somewhat close together and the for- 312
age of the country allows it, goats can be kept, but these 283
must be watered at least once a day. They furnish hair 342
for tent-cloth, and thus it is the goat that shelters the
Bedouin from the elements. In districts where forage [234
and water are still more abundant, sheep are raised, 439]
chiefly for their wool or as articles of export. Mutton is 262
the favorite meat all over Arabia, and although for a les- 574
ser occasion goats or camels may answer, when a great
sheikh gives a feast, sheep are the animals slaughtered.

Much has been written, and justly, about the beauty 231
and the endurance of Arabian horses, but they are not an 556
economic asset. In Central Arabia a horse is a pure lux-
ury. Often in summer they must live on camel's milk
just as humans do. They are kept and treated as house-
hold pets and are very intelligent and affectionate. Their
only function is to furnish an aristocratic mount for
pleasure, for state occasions and for war. During part
of the year there is abundant pasturage for them, but
they are a luxury afforded only by the sheikhs and the
very rich and their number is small.

There are years in Arabia when the spring rains fail 731 ●
partially or completely, and then the animals die by thou- 789
sands, or are driven to the nearest town to be sold for a 262
song. In such years starvation stalks abroad through the
land. Little children die because there is no food suit-
able for such tender stomachs, and the adults are even
more gaunt and thin than usual. The sheikhs are nearly
bankrupted by the number of poor they have to feed,
and the whole community waits and prays for more rain
the coming spring.

At the best the life of a desert Bedouin is one of a 511
poverty so bitter and deep that Westerners have little idea
of it. The entire outfit of a family could be bought for a
mere trifle.

members of his tribe. Besides collecting the taxes for the central government he imposes and collects his own levies.[1]

Of course, there are exceptions to the general pattern. There is, for example, the case of the Bedouin tribe Abu Kishk that owned 20 000 dunams of land in the Sharon.[2] The sheikh's family in whose name the land was registered, sold 10 000 dunams to the Jews. The whole tribe benefited from this transaction. Part of the money was invested in a 145 dunam orange plantation and used to dig new wells, part of it was distributed among the individual members who were thus enabled to exchange their tents for stone houses. Enough cash was left for building a school. The social, economic and sanitary conditions of the entire tribe were thus greatly improved by the actions of the tribal sheikh.

CHAPTER XI

Attitude of the Tribesmen towards Settlement

The Bedouin's traditional contempt for agriculture will not be changed, before he is psychologically conditioned for sedentary life. Economic disasters and subsequent starvation will not in themselves materially alter this attitude. After the drought seasons of 1931 and 1932 the situation of the Transjordan Bedouin was desperate; 1946/47 was likewise a year of deficient rainfall in Transjordan when about 50 per cent of the livestock perished.[3] But still we do not hear of a great number of Beni Sakhr tribesmen

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1. Himadeh, 1950, p. 430
2. Ashkenazi, 1938, pp. 18-19
3. Losses amounted to: sheep and goats — 40%, cattle — 45%, camels — 50%. cf. Final Report, part 2, 1949, p. 10

241 731 that were willing to engage in agriculture after the economic catastrophes of either the early 30's or the late 40's, because this tribal group is not yet ready for settlement. Similarly in Syria, as has been pointed out above, the calamitous season 1931/32 did not appreciably accelerate sedentarization. While the experienced Bedouin will take livestock losses and subsequent starvation in the desert as a matter of course, the novice cultivator will not face a harvest failure with the same equanimity. 166 731 In 1936 many Transjordan nomads had taken up cultivation for the first time, but the loss of their crops discouraged them so much, that they returned to the desert.[1]

241 166 178 Profound changes are, nevertheless, taking place in the mentality of the Bedouin. As a result of tribal disintegration many nomads have become increasingly interested in sedentary life. When the nomad sees the sheikh, alienated from the tribe, enjoy luxuries beyond his dreams, he may also want to improve his standard of living and enjoy the "comforts" of the settled villager whose existence is prosperous compared by the Bedouin's standard of life. Pride may keep the nomad from working on the land, but nevertheless there are now hundreds of Iraqi and Syrian villages inhabited by people who were formerly nomads. Some of them still maintain tribal customs although they have been settled for a long time and severed the relations with their original tribes.[2]

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1. Report, 1936, p. 349
2. El-Shihaby, 1950, pp. 278 seq.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

Locusts

Truly blessed are those countries and states which know not the Locust, nor have experienced his visitations.

When the word locust crops up, the average person thinks of the plagues of Egypt, and recalls vivid descriptions in the Old Testament. He pictures a mighty swarm of flying grasshoppers which settle on fruit trees, hedgerows, vegetable gardens and wheat fields, and after taking their fill, pass on. This is not an entirely false picture, but the reality is far worse. In a country like Arabia visitations are comparatively common, and one locust year is invariably followed by a second, third, and possibly a fourth. Locusts destroy not only all living bushes and available green grass, each blade of which is vital to life in a desert country like the Arabian peninsula, but cause untold hardship to townsmen and villagers. Sheep die in hundreds after a visitation because there is no more green or dry grass left for them to feed on. Though I speak with particular feeling for the Arabia I love, the locust problem is not confined to that country. Locusts annually devastate large tracts and districts of North Africa, Central and South Africa, Baluchistan, India, Persia, Iraq and Turkey.

The insect's home seems, however, to be Africa, and as far as Arabia is concerned, the general route followed by these pests in migration would seem to be from Abyssinia to Yaman in the first place. Thence the swarms apparently select one of two routes—one swarm going to Baluchistan and India via the South Arabian seaboard, and the other moving up into the Hijaz, Najd, North-Eastern tracts of Arabia, and on into Iraq and Persia. There are naturally many subsidiary migrations, but in the main as far as Arabia proper is concerned, I think—though I speak with diffidence—the theory of swarms coming over from Abyssinia and then dividing into two main streams, is fairly near the truth. This is the theory generally accepted among desert Arabs.

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MI
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who arrived in Kuwait on 27th February reported that he had seen further large flights in South Hasa and Qatif at the end of January and early in February, also that Hufuf had had a bad visitation in January.

"It was thus anticipated that March would see another invasion of Kuwait.

"Very fortunately except for the swarm mentioned above no locusts actually reached Iraq or Kuwait and the previous years' invasions were not repeated."

"On 23rd May Professor B. P. Uvarov of the South Kensington Natural History Museum, visited Kuwait to collect data regarding the previous three years' visitations, and the lines of approach of the various swarms up from S.W. Arabia to Najd and Kuwait. He prophesied that Kuwait would see no more locusts in 1932 or for another three or four years, as all evidence went to prove that they appeared in cycles of three years at a time. His prophecy came remarkably true, and between 1932 and 1935 there have been no locust visitations at all. Let us hope that 1936* will not see a reappearance."

So much for my own experience, and the damage done to town dwellers, and owners of gardens and sheep.

The Badawin proper, that is to say the great migrating camel tribes, do not mind the locusts much, in fact they rejoice in a way when they see them, for they indicate that the year is going to be a good one. Locusts, they say, only come in prosperous years.

It does not worry these nomads if large tracts of country are denuded of fodder; they simply move off to country which has not been visited. They know that the damage done by locust swarms is more or less local, and that the insect will move to more favourable country lying to the north (Iraq) and will not bother them for long. They also enjoy the wonderful opportunity to satisfy for once in a while their ever-prevailing hunger. Nor is this all, for their horses, camels and dogs all get their fill, as well as foxes, bustard, monitor lizards, kites, shrikes and a dozen other denizens of the desert.

I remember once, when coming home with my wife from the Bâtin by car, meeting a swarm of locusts flying very low, moving across the plain west of Jahrah. It was near sunset, and we saw several

* They did not appear in 1936 or 1937.

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full-sized *dhabb* and *warral* monitors on the side of the track chasing the flying locusts and jumping in the air to catch them. We were so much interested at the sight that we stopped our car and watched for some five minutes. There were eight large monitors, and in their excitement they appeared oblivious of our presence.

On another occasion I remember visiting a Badawin camp which had just received a visitation of Carmine or Red Locusts. The whole camp had turned out to slay and collect the insects for food, and from the numbers collected it was evident that they had had a most successful day. The roofs of all the black tents were strewn from end to end with dead locusts spread out to dry, every available mat, rug and *lahdf* was also laid out to take the excess catch, and camels, dogs, mares and human beings were hard at work eating the insects, whilst cooking pots, bags, paniers and water-skins were crammed to overflowing with dried ones.

I, personally, never could fancy locusts much, but my wife and daughter, especially the daughter, revelled in them. I am told that even the Badawin enjoy them for a few days only, after which their gorge seems to rise against the food, and they give the remnants of their catch to their animals.